



# Bitterroot National Forest

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## NEWS RELEASE

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### Bitterroot Forest Mourns Loss of Historic Pine

**Bitterroot National Forest – August 20, 2008.** The Alta Pine, likely the oldest ponderosa pine in Ravalli County, burned today.

The tree was burning from top to bottom when discovered. Fire was quickly establishing itself in the hollow trunk and by mid-morning, the top half of the tree fell after burning through. Painted Rocks Fire District firefighters were first on the scene, joined by West Fork Ranger District personnel. Dave Campbell, West Fork District Ranger, explained that "Ordinarily, we might cut a snag down that is on fire to prevent spread, but in this case the tree is culturally significant. Also, because it was hollow, it would have been very difficult to cut safely." Forest Service helicopters dropped water on the tree and the surrounding trees to prevent the fire from spreading. The fire was limited to about a half of an acre.

The cause of the fire is still under investigation.

The Alta Pine was believed to be the second largest ponderosa pine in Montana. In 1976, the tree was bored, revealing that the tree was 800 years old, making it approximately 832 years old. At its prime, the pine tree was 114 feet tall with a circumference of 13 feet, 3 inches. The tree is listed on the Register of Historic Trees of the United States, and the surrounding area is managed by the Forest Service as a historic site.

The Alta Pine has long been a popular attraction for visitors and residents alike. The massive tree was killed by lightning on July 16, 1993, after surviving other numerous other strikes during the 1980's. Despite its death, it continued to inspire people to take a drive and hike the 100-foot trail leading from the road to the pine. At some point during its life, the tree's bark was peeled to harvest a portion of the cambium layer, leaving a distinctive scar. This cambium-peeled ponderosa pine had "cultural significance to local tribes," according to Mary Williams, Forest Historian.

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